



Bill: SB547

Committee: House Environment and Transportation

Position: Support

Date: March 20, 2024

Chair Korma, Vice Chair Boyce, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our collective Maryland members, we respectfully request that the Environment and Transportation Committee support SB547 which would prevent circuses and other traveling wild animal acts from using bears, big cats, elephants, and primates in traveling acts in Maryland. This legislation is consistent with laws passed in eight states as well as almost 200 U.S. localities, including Gaithersburg and Montgomery County. With growing public awareness about the miserable lives endured by animals used in traveling shows, animal-based circuses have been dwindling in popularity. While some circuses, such as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and UniverSoul Circus have eliminated animal acts, others still use these sensitive—and still very much wild—animals and force them to perform, including here in Maryland. (Please see appendix included in our House testimony for more information about the traveling shows that have recently brought wild animal acts to Maryland.)

Cruel treatment

These inhumane and outdated acts force wild animals into unnatural displays and grueling performances that involve often-hidden abusive training methods. Training tools commonly used by circuses include bullhooks, whips, sticks, ropes, and electric prods to force animals to perform confusing tricks on command. These archaic training tools can result in trauma, suffering, lacerations, puncture wounds, and abscesses. Many wild animal exhibitors have histories of poor animal care and violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act. For example, shows that travel to Maryland have been cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for failure to provide animals with adequate veterinary care, shelter, and minimum space as well as unsafe handling.

Prolonged confinement

Wild animals used in traveling shows endure months of prolonged confinement while being hauled from city to city, including stops in Maryland. Animals such as bears, big cats, and primates are confined to the same small transport cages that they eat, sleep, defecate, and urinate in. Elephants are kept chained by two legs, barely able to take a step. Deprived of adequate exercise and appropriate social groupings and with no opportunities to express natural behaviors, wild animals often exhibit signs of severe and chronic stress. Life in an unhealthy environment on the road also means that sick animals may not have access to immediate and expert veterinary care.

Public health and safety concerns

Traveling shows bring stressed, unpredictable wild animals dangerously close to the public. Animal trainers have been attacked, and sometimes killed, in front of horrified audiences. Elephants have rampaged during rides with frightened children clinging to their backs. Primates have run amok at fairs, injuring fair goers. In Landover Hills, a tiger escaped from a circus with elementary schoolchildren

nearby. Wild animal escapes also endanger first responders who are not trained to deal with a bear, big cat, primate, or elephant running loose in the community.

Wild animals can also spread viral, bacterial, parasitic, and fungal infections that pose serious health risks to people. For example, approximately 12.4 percent of captive elephants in the U.S. have tested positive for *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (a human strain of TB), but many more may actually be infected with this deadly bacterial lung disease since TB testing on elephants is not required and unreliable. Captive big cats and primates in the U.S. have contracted SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID, but again, testing is not required, even when an animal is showing symptoms of the disease.

No impact on zoos or the local economy

Many forms of family entertainment, including former animal-based circuses, deliver quality amusement without the suffering inherent in wild animal acts. SB547 does not impact exhibits at zoos or other non-mobile, permanent institutions, so long as animals are not transported offsite or to the facility for a performance. If a traveling show that continues to use wild animals chooses not to perform in Maryland, residents will simply spend their entertainment budget on something else in the community, such as a ballgame, miniature golf, live theater, or amusement park.

It is important for the Committee to understand that lemurs, which historically may have been used occasionally as ambassador animals, should absolutely be prohibited from these traveling performances. Like all wild animals, lemurs can be aggressive and unpredictable and have been involved in numerous attacks on members of the public, including children. Since rabies vaccines are not legally approved for use in primates, some states may require that a prosimian be euthanized for rabies testing following a bite or scratch. For example, a lemur at a New York roadside zoo bit a 7-year-old boy during a public interaction offered by the zoo. The victim had to receive a series of rabies prevention shots and a judge ordered that three lemurs at the facility be killed and tested for rabies. Putting these animals in a position where the public may be harmed increases the risk that the animal may have to be euthanized and is thus inconsistent with promoting the animals' welfare.

In light of the overwhelming public health and safety and animal welfare concerns associated with using bears, big cats, elephants, and primates in traveling shows, we urge you to support SB547. **The Senate bill has been amended to conform to the House bill that the Committee already passed, and we urge a favorable report with no additional amendments.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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